



Comhairle Cathrach na Gaillimhe  
Galway City Council

## Draft Proposals for Expansion of Knocknacarra District Centre

*March 2009*

## **Background**

Knocknacarra has evolved over the last 20 years to become the largest suburb of Galway City. Although there are no defining boundaries to the area the Bearna ED 2006 gives a rough definition of the area and a notion of the population profile.

Making allowances for increases since 2006, this area has an approximate population of 13,400 persons of which a quarter are under 18 years of age. Although the population growth rate which increased from 7,031 in 1996 has slowed down in recent years this is still a burgeoning suburb.

It is reasonable to consider that a community of this size would want a stamp of identity independent from the overall city and a range of facilities and amenities that support and harness community development. Recent years have witnessed the delivery of some key projects in the area – parks, school sites, playgrounds, bus routes. In addition there has been development in the commercial sector including hotel, shopping, leisure, service retail and professional services.

However the scale of Knocknacarra warrants more investment particularly in the provision of community facilities. In this regard it is necessary to reflect on what is the best response to this demand and also to look at how it can be delivered most expediently. This also requires the taking into consideration of the best locations and the need for flexibility to enable a response to future changes in use, lifestyles and demography.

*Having taken all these factors into consideration the prospect of expanding the existing Knocknacarra District Centre to accommodate these future community needs is considered the best option. This is presented now to get a feed back from the public regarding opinion on these proposed changes.*

In 2002 in response to what was considered a deficit of zoned lands for retail facilities the current site at Ragoon (the Dunnes Stores Development) was earmarked for such use. However the Development Plan went a step further, in requiring that in addition to the provision of retailing at this location other uses which help build a community, allow for social interaction and respond to the wider needs of a population, that is likely to reach 18,000 persons, were encouraged and facilitated on these lands. This approach takes the view that for a District Centre to work it must meet a wide variety of demands by attracting the widest possible range of users, amenities and social groups. It must be safe and attractive and give opportunities for people to meet. It should be easy to get to and link physically and integrate visually with its surroundings.

An opportunity is now presented which fits in with this original philosophy and vision for the District Centre in Knocknacarra. This proposal merits consideration. – see fig 1 for general site location.



*Figure 1 Site location in the Greater Knocknacarra Area*

## **The Proposal**

The proposal consists of four distinct elements (to be read in conjunction with the attached Map Attached)

**1.** A core element of the proposal includes for playing pitches and a sports/community centre located and linked to the existing shopping centre, the proposed civic area, crèche and the primary health care facility connected together with a spine road. These would be located adjoining the Connaught Laundry site and would be flanked by two roads - Bothar Stiofan and the Ragoon Road. This area would require approximately 2.97ha (7.53 acres) and would accommodate the development of new pitches of an equivalent size to those currently provided for at Millar's Lane. The balance of the lands would be developed for a sports/community centre. The design as proposed includes for a building of approximately 5,750m<sup>2</sup> in floorarea, this would accommodate a number of facilities including a swimming pool, gymnasium, meeting rooms and changing facilities. The location adjacent to the pitches would allow for complementary uses of these facilities. These lands are currently zoned **I** – Industry.

**2.** The consequence of providing these facilities would involve relinquishing the use of the Millar's Lane grounds as playing pitches and allow for 3/4 of these lands to be developed for housing purposes – as in current **R** zoning. The balance, approximately 1 acre, would be retained for amenity use and would be so designed to link in with and

enhance the protected boreen at - Millars Lane. These lands are currently zoned **RA** - recreational /amenity use. The developer would gain ownership of these lands, transfer ownership of their lands as per point no. 1 to the Local Authority and make a significant commitment / contribution to the development of the pitches and sports/community centre.

**3.** In addition it is proposed to consolidate the District Centre by extending the current District Centre zoning northwards to a bank of land of approximately 3.34ha (8.27 acres) allowing for similar uses to what exists /has been granted permission. These lands are currently zoned **I** –Industry.

**4.** It is proposed to dedicate approximately 0.4ha (1 acre) of land zoned RA in private ownership for public use, no change in zoning is intended - simply transfer to public ownership for possible use as a cycle lane, improved pedestrian access and landscaping. These lands run parallel and to the rear of Gort Greine housing development. The adjoining road is currently in the process of being transferred to the Local Authority and with some improvements will be opened in the near future for public usage.

## **Consequences and Merits**

The proposals include for some significant changes in current use and land use zonings. The site which is proposed for pitch/sport centre use is not in use and is zoned for **I** - industrial purposes. It is part of a large rectangular block of land predominantly in single ownership and linked already internally by a spine road. There would be a reduction in the economic value of the lands if these 2.97ha (7.5 acres) were to be dedicated for community uses as proposed. This would have a similar value of zoning as current RA zoning – recreational and amenity.

In addition the proposal would require the lands to be transferred into the ownership of Galway City Council.

The benefits of delivering sport pitches and a sports/community centre to Knocknacarra are apparent. The opportunity for such a development at this location, purposefully designed and with complementary uses is significant in view of the potential to contribute to a healthy mix of uses in a designated District Centre. This location would have a sustainable benefit in that it would provide a location where a number of activities could be carried out within walking distance of each other – ‘multi –purpose trips.’ The location affords connections to the greater Knocknacarra area by bus, car, cycle and foot having immediate link in with the road /path network. The site is open in public views, it allows for passive surveillance and for the establishment of a community focus and for a landmark location. This is critical and contributes to the potential for long-term

community commitment which is necessary in the management and the maintenance of all public facilities.

The success of delivery of similar facilities has been delayed to date which is a missed opportunity for this area, which has quite a sizable population. A positive aspect of this current proposal is that it is not an isolated zoning exercise; it is an opportunity to achieve planning gain as it is directly allied to a means of delivering the built sport /community centre with the advantage of developing adjoining accessible modern playing facilities.

The proposal under point 2 above indicates that there would be consequences to going ahead with this development. The development of the community facilities would involve relinquishing the current use of the Millar's Lane in favour of residential use albeit with a significant quantum of amenity land being retained. It is acknowledged that the Millar's Lane site does have existing community value which can't be ignored. However the pitches by virtue of ground levels and drainage are difficult to use and maintain. The layout and address of the adjacent housing developments have not exploited any linkage with the Millar's Lane pitches which has resulted in the pitches becoming backlands without the critical benefit of being directly over looked and passively supervised. The proposal to re-locate the pitches within a 5 minute walk from the existing location, to develop these new pitches to a high modern standard and provide the critical changing and gym facilities in tandem with the pitches is considered to outweigh the loss of the pitches at the existing location at Millar's Lane.

To allow housing on the site of the pitches would be compatible with the adjoining uses. The current proposal would not off set the need to consequently go through the normal planning process and be subject to normal planning controls, including for third party observations. In acknowledgement of the existing use, and to safeguard and exploit the potential linkage along Millar's Lane boreen, there would be a requirement to retain 20% of the lands in amenity use.

As a consequence of the new layout proposals it is also proposed to re-zone lands as indicated in point 3 above. There is merit in this proposal as it will still include for **I** zoned uses but if changed to **CI** it will allow for a more flexible layout and linkage between the "Shopping" element, the Civic Space and the Recreational facilities. It will enable the District Centre to operate as an integrated block of land defined by public roads. It will also facilitate a stronger focus for identity in Knocknacarra and will reduce trip requirements where many facilities are located within the same area and within walking distance of each other, similarly to a town centre. This could be further complemented by routing public transport through these lands and providing a terminus type stop at this location.

In the event of this proposal being acceptable these lands would become part of the District Centre and would, like the current zoning, have a requirement to deliver a balance of uses which contribute to the success of a District Centre.

## **Procedure to Advance Proposals**

The proposals highlighted, other than that under point 4, would require a change in the Development Plan zoning as they materially differ from what is already provided for in the City Plan. This would require a variation procedure to be initiated. This would require all the drawings and details to be put on public display, this would allow for public consultation and formal submission of observations/submissions on the proposals. The proposal, including any submissions, would be incorporated into a 'Manager's Report' and presented to the Council who would ultimately decide to allow, amend or reject the proposals. If accepted, these new zonings would be adopted and would allow for planning applications to proceed. If not adopted then the zonings/uses would remain as they are currently.

As a critical element in these proposals is to facilitate and deliver a sports/community centre and playing pitches in Knocknacarra any changes would be so structured as to ensure these facilities are commenced /built in advance of relinquishing the Millar's Lane lands or allowing for any housing to be built on the lands. The wording in any proposal for a variation would include for this condition.

With respect to the balance of the proposed re-zoning (Point 3) it is the Council's view that these lands will, in conjunction with the existing CI lands operate as a District Centre and should deliver development on a phased basis with community benefits delivered at each stage - these could include for a civic space, community health facilities, transport infrastructure and similar essential elements.

In addition uses such as residential would be required to add to the mix and give a "life" to the District Centre. The scale of housing would be determined in addition to the potential to limit certain types of retail and levels of retail floorspace in the interests of the retail strategy for the City. Opportunities for employment would also be encouraged which would add to the existing provision in the Shopping Centre and adjoining Hibernian/Avivas site.

The end objective would be to give a focus and identity to Knocknacarra to allow for social interaction and to provide for the facilities that an ultimate population of 18,000 persons require to function in a sustainable and properly planned for manner.

### **Consultation**

The current consultation is an exercise to get a preliminary response from the community on the changes being suggested. This consultation is informal and will be taken onboard by the City Manager and the Council in the decision to advance/not to a full variation to the City Development Plan as described above. All comments are appreciated; these can be comments on the entire proposals, part of the proposals and/or suggestions for amendments, all are welcome. These should be submitted in writing to : -

*Senior Planner, Planning Department, City Hall, College Road, Galway on or before 19<sup>th</sup> March 2009. or by email to [devplan@galwaycity.ie](mailto:devplan@galwaycity.ie)*